

That Which Pleases God

An Examination of What God Delights In

7 God Delights in Doing Good to Those Who Hope in Him

February 16, 2014

Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.

Psalm 147:10&11

10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.

11 The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness.

To the Glory of God

Can you imagine what it would be like to hear God rejoicing? A mere *spoken* Word from His Mouth brought the entire Universe into existence. So what would happen if God lifted up His Voice and not only spoke- but shouted! Perhaps a new heaven and a new earth would be created. The Prophet Isaiah imagined this when he wrote in **Isaiah 65:17&18**

17 “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.

18 “But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem *for* rejoicing And her people *for* gladness.

So what do you hear when you imagine the Voice of God shouting His Delight? I hear the booming of Niagara Falls mingled with the trickle of a mountain stream. I hear the blast of Mt. St. Helens mingled

with a kitten's purr. I hear the power of a hurricane and the gentleness of a wind across the lake. I hear the unimaginable roar of the sun which is 865,000 miles thick and 1,300,000 times bigger than the earth, and nothing but fire burning at 1,000,000 degrees centigrade on the *cooler* surface of the corona. But I also hear this unimaginable roar mingled with the tender, warm crackling of logs in the living room on a cozy winter's night.

And when I hear this shouting- I stand dumbfounded and staggered and speechless that God is rejoicing over me- a wicked sinner who has dishonored Him so many times and in so many ways. It is almost too good to be true. And the Holy Bible says that God doesn't just do me "Good"- but that He *delights* in doing me "Good"- He is actually rejoicing over my "Good" with all His Heart and with all His Soul. The Lord God virtually breaks forth into song when He hits upon a new way to do me "Good".

Now I would never dare to say these things on my own authority. This is not coming from my own imagination. And I couldn't dare to believe this if I had not seen another foundation for God's Delight other than me and my own righteousness. I found this in the Holy Bible- specifically from the infallible Authority of the Prophet Jeremiah- who wrote this in **Jeremiah 32:39-41**- please turn there with me. In that Passage- Almighty God says:

39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for *the good of their children* after them.

40 "I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.

41 "I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.

Now you simply cannot escape the Divine Happiness of this Passage by thinking that this Rejoicing was promised only to Israel and not to us as well. God will not let you get away from His Goodness that easily. When Jeremiah speaks of an "*Everlasting Covenant*" that God will make with His People in **Jeremiah 32:40**- He means the "*New Covenant*" described just one chapter earlier in **Jeremiah 31:31-34** that says:

31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

34 “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

This New Covenant is the Covenant that Jesus sealed with His Blood. Remember how at the Last Supper He said,

1Corinthians 11:25

“This cup is the *new covenant* in my blood”

... so the benefits of *this* Covenant reach as far as the Blood of Jesus reaches. So that means that what Jeremiah said almost 600 years before Jesus was born applies to us today. And in **2Corinthians 3:6**- the Apostle Paul said his entire Ministry *among Jews and Gentiles* was the Ministry of the “**New Covenant**” and that means that:

Ephesians 3:6b

... the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

So you simply can't escape the Happiness of God's Promise by saying you are not a natural born Jew. Because by faith in Jesus Christ- through the Blood of the Covenant, you can *be* a “**true Jew**” (**Romans 2:29**). And “**If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise**” (**Galatians 3:29**).

Now think about this for a minute. Don't run your eyes over the Promises of God like the wrong pages in a phone book. God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, said,

“I will not turn away from doing good to them.... I will rejoice in doing them good ... with all my heart and with all my soul.”

... so let all three of these Promises sink in:

Promise 1. God will never turn away from doing you “Good”. And He will keep on doing “Good” to every soul who is genuinely born again. And He doesn’t do “Good” to His children on occasion and by times- and then do “bad” to them at other times. No, *God keeps on* doing us “Good”, and He never will stop doing us “Good” for ten thousand ages of ages. So when things are going “bad” for us- that does not mean that God has stopped doing “*Good*”. It simply means that He is shifting things around to get them in place in order to do more “Good”- as long as we will keep on fearing Him and hoping in Him.

Romans 8:28

... God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

Psalms 84:11

No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Isaiah 38:17

Lo, for *my own* welfare I had great bitterness

Psalms 119:71

It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

Now George Mueller was a great man of prayer who built orphanages and inspired the faith of thousands back in the 19th Century. And Mueller shows us how to lay hold on this first great Promise that God will not turn away from doing “Good” to us. In July of 1853- Lydia Mueller, his only natural born child, was struck with typhoid fever. She came to the brink of death but through the prayers of many she was mercifully spared. Mueller’s description of this trial is full of wisdom and faith. He said,

“While I was in this affliction, this great affliction, besides being at peace, so far as the Lord’s dispensation was concerned, I also felt perfectly at peace

with regard to the cause of the affliction. Once on a former occasion, the hand of the Lord was heavily laid on me in my family. I had not the least hesitation in knowing, that it was the Father's rod, applied in infinite wisdom and love, for the restoration of my soul from a state of lukewarmness. At this time, however, I had no such feeling. Conscious as I was of manifold weaknesses, failings, and shortcomings, so that I too would be ready to say with the Apostle Paul, "O wretched man that I am"; yet I was assured that this affliction was not upon me in the way of the fatherly rod, but for the trial of my faith.... Parents know what an only child, a beloved child is, and what to believing parents an only child, a believing child, must be. Well, the Father in heaven said, as it were, by this His dispensation, Art thou willing to give up this child to Me? My heart responded, As it seems good to Thee, my Heavenly Father. Thy will be done. But as our hearts were made willing to give back our beloved child to Him who had given her to us, so He was ready to leave her to us, and she lived. *"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart"* (Psalm 37:4). The desires of my heart were, to retain the beloved daughter, if it were the will of God; the means to retain her were, to be satisfied with the will of the Lord.

Of all the trials of faith that as yet I have had to pass through, this was the greatest; and by God's abundant mercy, I own it to His praise, I was enabled to delight myself in the will of God; for I felt perfectly sure, that, if the Lord took this beloved daughter, it would be best for her parents, best for herself, and more for the glory of God than if she lived: this better part I was satisfied with; and thus my heart had peace, perfect peace, and I had not a moment's anxiety."

Now before you respond to this by saying, *"Well, it's very easy to speak of God's Goodness when you get your dying daughter back,"* listen to the rest of the story. On February 6, 1870, George Mueller's wife, Mary, died of rheumatic fever. They had been married for thirty-nine years and four months. He was sixty-four years old. Shortly after the funeral he was strong enough to preach a *"funeral sermon"*, as he called it. What Scripture would he choose when God had taken his best beloved? He chose **Psalm 119:68a**,

You are good and do good...

... and the three points of his sermon was:

1. The Lord was Good, and did Good in giving her to me.
2. The Lord was Good, and did Good in so long leaving her to me.
3. The Lord was Good and did Good in taking her from me.

And under this third point- he recounts how he prayed for her during her illness:

“Yes, my Father, the times of my darling wife are in Thy hands. Thou wilt do the very best thing for her and for me, whether life or death. If it may be, raise up yet again my precious wife—Thou art able to do it, though she is so ill; but howsoever Thou dealest with me, only help me to continue to be perfectly satisfied with Thy holy Will.”

And as he reflected on the way God had answered his prayer, he said,

“Everyday I see more and more how great [is] her loss to the orphans. Yet, without an effort, my inmost soul habitually joys in the joy of that loved departed one. Her happiness gives joy to me. My dear daughter and I would not have her back, were it possible to produce it by the turn of the hand. God Himself has done it; we are satisfied with Him.”

Dear friends- God never stops doing Good to His Covenant people. And if an enemy is temporarily given the upper hand- we can say, straight into the muzzle of the gun, *“You mean evil against me, but God means it for good” (Genesis 50:20)*. Since God is Sovereign and has promised not to turn away from doing Good to His Covenant people- we can know beyond all doubt that in tribulation and distress and persecution and famine and nakedness and peril and sword, that we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us (**Romans 8:35–37**).

Promise 2. But the Promise is greater yet. **Not only does God promise not to turn away from doing good to us, He says, “I will rejoice in doing them good” (Jeremiah 32:41).**

Deuteronomy 30:9

Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in

the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers;

So from this we can know that God does not bless us *begrudgingly*. There is an *eagerness* about the Way that God goes about doing Good to His children. And He does not wait for us to come to Him. He seeks us out, because it is His Pleasure to do us "Good".

2Chronicles 16:9a

For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His...

God is not waiting for us- He is actively pursuing us. And that is the *literal* translation of **Psalm 23:6** that literally says in the Hebrew:

Surely goodness and mercy shall *pursue* me all the days of my life.

God loves to show Mercy. And He is not the least bit hesitant or indecisive or tentative in His Desire to do "Good" to His people. His Anger is released slowly and steady- but His Mercy comes off quickly. And that is what He meant when He came down on Mount Sinai and said to Moses in **Exodus 34:6b**:

The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

The point here is the contrast between the *sluggishness* of His Anger and the eagerness of His Love. So the God that we serve is never irritable or edgy. He is never fatigued or depressed or blue or moody or stressed out. And His Anger never has a short fuse. He is not easily annoyed- even by repeated sins. He is above any possibility of being touchy or cranky or temperamental. Instead He is infinitely energetic with absolutely unbounded with unending Enthusiasm for the fulfillment of That Which Pleases Him.

And this is hard for us to comprehend because we have to sleep every night just to cope- not to mention to succeed. We go up and down in our enjoyments. We get bored and discouraged one day and feel hopeful and excited another. We are like little geysers that gurgle and sputter and pop erratically. But God is like a great Niagara—you look

at it and think: *"Surely this can't keep going at this force for year after year after year!" It is too big, too large, too powerful, too breathtaking, and it seems like it would have to rest or it seems like some place up stream it would run dry.*" But, no, it just keeps surging and crashing and making us stand there and watch it in awe. And that's the way God is about doing us "Good". He never grows weary of it and it never gets boring to Him.

Psalms 35:27

Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; And let them say continually, "The LORD be magnified, Who delights in the prosperity of His servant."

Now the reason why God delights in the welfare of His servants is not because we are worthy of that Delight but because Him delighting in doing us "Good" shows His Greatness.

God Himself has Sovereignly overcome every obstacle that would keep Him from lavishing Kindness on us forever. And that is what the Sermon was about last week. God the Father delighted in crushing Jesus Christ to bear the Condemnation that stood like a dam between the desert valley of our sinful lives and the trillion-ton, cool, clear, deep, fresh-water Reservoir of God's Goodness. So because Jesus was crushed- there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (**Romans 8:1**). He carried our griefs and bore our sorrows and triumphed over death **"so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"** (**Ephesians 2:7**).

The God of the Bible is not like an insecure bully- who likes to show off his strength by putting weaker people down. God loves to show off His Greatness by being an inexhaustible Source of Strength to build weak people up. His exuberance in delighting in the welfare of His Servants is the measure of the immensity of His Resources- what the Bible calls **"the riches of his glory."** **"My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus"** (**Philippians 4:19**). As the psalmist said in **Psalm 149:4**:

For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the afflicted ones with salvation

So God's Pleasure in His Son is the Pleasure He has in the breathtaking panorama of His Own unlimited Perfections reflected back to Him in the Countenance of Jesus Christ. God is an infinitely beautiful Person. And if at any time in your life you have loved anything that is beautiful- you can begin to understand the value of this. Because all the beauty in the universe is nothing but a lower quality spin-off of the original Beauty of God. And one of the Ways God expresses His Delight in His Own Beauty is by giving it away to His people. So the psalmist says that God takes Pleasure in His people by adorning them or by beautifying them with His Own Beauty. And He does that now in part through the wonderful Work of Grace called "the fruit of the Spirit" - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (**Galatians 5:22**). But He will *complete* this beautification process at the Resurrection- when the whole Creation stands up to celebrate "**the glorious liberty of the children of God**" (**Romans 8:21**), and on that day- all true believers "**will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father**" (**Matthew 13:43**).

So there is no joy- no matter how great- that men and women have known in their happiest moments- that can compare with the Joy of God in beautifying His people.

In this process of beautifying his people God rejoices to take away every pain and sorrow and misery. So there are Holy and Wise reasons for our troubles and our persecutions and our afflictions, and they are reasons for our Good. But God will rejoice over us in fullness when the lessons are over and the final exams are passed and the vacation has begun. When God sees us perfectly whole- with no tears and no pain and no blemishes and no disabilities and no defects- He will break forth into shouting His Delight. And our joy in the infinite Beauty of the new Heaven and the new Earth and the Beauty of our new immortal and sinless bodies and the Beauty of perfect Holiness will be a Joy in the beautiful rejoicing of God.

Promise 3. But still the Promise is greater. First, God promises not to turn away from doing us "Good". Then, He promises that He will do this "Good" with rejoicing. And finally, **God promises that this rejoicing over the "Good" of His people will be with all His Heart and with all His Soul.**

Jeremiah 32:41

I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, *with all my heart and with all my soul*

So how do you describe the joy of doing something “**with all your heart and with all your soul?**” One way is to use comparisons that awaken in everybody the kind of emotions this would involve. For example, Isaiah uses one to help us understand the fullness of God’s Joy over us as His Covenant people.

Isaiah 62:4&5

4 It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken," Nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate"; But you will be called, "My delight is in her," And your land, "Married"; For the LORD delights in you, And *to Him* your land will be married.

5 For *as* a young man marries a virgin, *So* your sons will marry you; And *as* the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, *So* your God will rejoice over you.

This means that when God does “Good” to His people- it is not so much like a reluctant judge showing kindness to a criminal whom he finds despicable (though that analogy has truth in it); it is like a bridegroom showing affection to his bride.

Now sometimes we joke and say about a marriage, “*The honeymoon is over now.*” But that’s because we are finite. We can’t always *sustain* a honeymoon level of intensity and affection forever. We can’t foresee the irritations that come with long-term familiarity. We can’t stay as fit and as handsome as we were back then. We can’t come up with enough new things to keep the relationship fresh. But God says His Joy over His people is like a bridegroom over a bride. And He is talking about honeymoon intensity and honeymoon pleasures and honeymoon energy and excitement and enthusiasm and enjoyment. And by using these illustrations- God is trying to get into our hearts what He means when He says He rejoices over us *with all His Heart and with all; His Soul.*

And add to this, that with God- the honeymoon never ends! He is infinite in Power and Wisdom and Creativity and Love. And so He has no trouble sustaining a honeymoon level of intensity; He can foresee all the future quirks of our personality and has decided from before the

foundation of the world that He will keep what's "Good" for us and change what isn't. So God will always be as handsome as He ever was, and will see to it that His bride gets more and more beautiful forever, and He is infinitely creative to think of new things to do together so that there will be no boredom for the next trillion ages of millenniums.

Now Jesus uses another comparison to help us feel the force of what it means to have the Father rejoice over us *with all His Heart*. In **Luke 15**- the Lord says two different times that

“there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance”

... then He illustrates what happens in Heaven by telling a story about a father who had a wayward son who left home and squandered all his inheritance. The son comes to his senses while feeding pigs in a far country, and decides to go home and seek mercy from his father. He heads home and, as he goes, prepares a speech something to this effect: *“Father, I'm not worthy to be called your son; so maybe you would let me just live in the servants' quarters and work and eat with them?”* And as Jesus tells this story you can feel the energy of love building as in verse 20- He shows us exactly how the father rejoices “with all his heart” over the boy's arrival.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

So this father doesn't hold back and watch to see what the boy looks like. No, He bursts out the front door and starts running down the road. Now don't miss the force of this scene. Well-to-do, dignified, aristocratic, aging Jewish men back in the 1st Century didn't run- they always walked. They always kept their dignified composure. They always showed that they were on top of their emotions. But not in Jesus' story about God's Joy over His people.

And the boy couldn't believe his eyes. The smell of pigs was still on him and the thought flashed through his mind to turn and escape this utterly unexpected demonstration of affection from his father. But he does *not* turn. And Jesus says the father embraced him and kissed him-

pig smell and all. And you simply can't picture that embrace without feeling the emotion of the father's delight.

But I really think the emotion goes far deeper than this. I know I am that son in Jesus' story and I cannot comprehend that the Father in Heaven- the great and glorious Creator of all the universe and Sovereign over all things- throws all dignified self-consciousness to the wind and runs to me and embraces me and kisses me, as though He is actually happy with me. But the Bible is clear, dear friends- God is glad *with all his heart* that we are part of His Family. And this is why I can never read about that embrace without pausing to let my eyes and my throat recover.

But Jesus is not finished with the story yet. We still do not feel all that is meant by the words "**with all my heart.**" The father cuts off the boy's speech before he can get to the part about coming back as a slave. None of that! Instead, the father orders the best robe to replace the rags, he calls for a beautiful family ring, he fits him with new shoes, even though the old ones were used to run away, and, to top it all off, the father gives a great banquet with the best food and a band of minstrels to fill the air with happy music.

And this is the Message Jesus has for any who will turn home to the Father and seek their joy in the Wonders of His Love. And this Message is not new. It is as old as the Prophets. And one of them puts this same Message in the form of a magnificent and almost unbelievable Promise of God's rejoicing over His people:

Zephaniah 3:17

The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.

Now please linger with me for a few moments to clarify something that has been assumed in this Sermon series. I have repeatedly assumed that the Benefits of God's Promises and the purchase of Jesus' Death and Resurrection are for the people of God. I have also assumed that the mark of this people is not merely that they are "chosen before the foundation of the world," but that they have willingly *responded* to God in a certain way. In this Sermon- I have focused mainly on God's Pleasure in the "Good" of His people. He rejoices in doing us "Good"

with all His Heart and with all His Soul. But it has become clear that in order to explain this- I have had to raise the question of our proper response to God.

We must understand that God does not rejoice to do "Good" to everyone in the same way. Though His sun rises on the just and the unjust (**Matthew 5:45**), there is a saving Grace that abounds to those who hope in His Love. **"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.... Draw near to God and he will draw near to you"** (**James 4:6, 8**).

Now it is fitting that we dwell on this for a while. God's Pleasure in the Good of His people is inseparably connected with His Pleasure in a certain kind of "response" that defines just who His people are. The Truth of Sovereign Election does not nullify the teaching of Scripture that no one is saved who does not respond to the Call and the Commands of the Gospel. And God will see to it that His elect hear the Call and respond the way they should (**Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 11:19–20; 36:27; Matthew 11:27; John 6:37, 44, 65; 10:16; 11:52; The Acts 13:48; 16:14; 18:10; 1Corinthians 1:23&24; 1Thessalonians 1:4&5; 2Thessalonians 2:13; 2Timothy 2:25**).

But God does not do this in a way that *lessens* or that *cheapens* our accountability and our responsibility to hear and believe and repent and follow and obey and persevere. There is nothing about the Biblical Truth of Sovereign Election that in any way reduces or negates our responsibility to obey the Gospel and anyone who says that there is- doesn't understand Sovereign Election properly. And how our human response works together with God's absolute Sovereignty is indeed a mystery but it is a mystery that we can understand- at least on some level.

So our human response to God is utterly crucial. And God has Pleasure in a certain kind of human response. And up till now in this Series- we have *not* focused on what kind of human attitudes and actions God delights in. We have focused primarily on God's Pleasure in His Own Glory. And I believe this order is very important. We need to see first and foremost that God is God- and that He is perfect and complete in Himself, and that the God of the Bible is overflowing Happy in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity, and that He does not need us to complete His Fullness, and, therefore, He is not deficient without us. We are deficient without *Him*. The all-sufficient Glory of

God, freely given in fellowship through His sacrificed Son, is the Stream of Living Water that we have thirsted for all our lives.

And unless we begin with God in this way- when the Gospel comes to us- we will inevitably put ourselves at the center of it. We will feel that *our* value rather than *God's* Value is the driving Force behind the Gospel. We will trace the Gospel back to God's supposed need for *us* instead of tracing it back to the Grace that rescues sinners- who desperately need *Him*.

But the Gospel is the "good news" that God is the all-satisfying End of all our longings, and that even though He does not need us- and is, in fact, estranged from us because of our God-belittling sins- He has, in the great Love with which He loved us- made a way for sinners to drink at the River of His Delights through Jesus Christ. And we will not be enthralled by this Good News unless we feel that He was not *obligated* to do this. He was not coerced or constrained by our value. So God Himself is the Center of the Gospel. And the exaltation of *His Own* Glory is the driving Force behind the Gospel. So the Gospel is a Gospel of *Grace!* And Grace is the Pleasure of God to magnify the Worth of God by giving sinners the right and power to delight in God without obscuring the Glory of God.

For six weeks now- we have focused on the Pleasures that God has in Himself and in the absolute Freedom of His Work- so that it would be unmistakable to us that God is the Center of the Gospel. Up to now- I have only suggested occasionally the kind of *response* that would bring God Pleasure. But now we are ready in this final Message to be able to see why the human responses which God *demand*s and *enjoys* come as good news to sinners, and yet keep God at the center of His Own Affections. So we need to understand two things:

- A. If the Gospel demands a response from sinners- then the Demand itself must be good news instead of an added burden- otherwise the Gospel would not be Good News.
- B. If the true Biblical Gospel always has God at the center- then the response it demands from us must magnify Him and not us.

So what kind of human response can accomplish both of these things: To be good news for sinners and a Glory to God? And the answer

is given clearly in the second Scripture that Brother Andy read to us at the beginning- **Psalm 147:10&11:**

10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.

11 The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness.

Now consider with me first, from verse 11, why God takes Pleasure in **“those who fear him and wait (hope) for His lovingkindness.”** Then we will turn to verse 10 and refine our answer by asking why God does *not* delight in **“the strength of the horse and the legs of a man.”**

Does it strike you as strange that we should be encouraged to *fear* and *hope* at the same time and in the same Person? **“The LORD takes pleasure in those who *fear* him, in those who wait (*hope*) in His steadfast love (lovingkindness).”** Do you hope in the one you fear and fear the one you hope in? It’s usually the other way around: if we fear a person- we hope that someone *else* will come and help us. But here we are supposed to fear the One we hope in and hope in the One we fear. So what does this mean?

It means that we should let the experience of hope penetrate and transform the experience of fear. In other words, the kind of fear that we should have toward God is whatever is left of fear when we have a sure hope in the midst of it.

Suppose you were exploring an unknown glacier in the north of Greenland in the dead of winter. And just as you reach a sheer cliff with a spectacular view of miles and miles of jagged ice and mountains of snow- a terrible storm breaks in. The wind is so strong that the fear rises in your heart that it might blow you over the cliff. But in the midst of the storm you discover a cleft in the ice where you can hide. Here you feel secure. But, even though secure, the awesome might of the storm rages on, and you watch it with a kind of trembling pleasure as it surges out across the distant glaciers.

At first there was the fear that this terrible storm and awesome terrain might claim your life. But then you found a refuge and gained the hope that you would be safe. But not everything in this feeling called “fear” vanished from your heart- just the life-threatening part. There remained the trembling, the awe, the wonder, and the respect

that you would never want to tangle with such a storm or be the adversary of such a power.

And so it is with God. In the very same Psalm we read,

Psalms 147:16&17

16 He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes.

17 He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold?

So the cold of God is a fearful thing—who can stand against it! And verses 4&5 point to the same Power of God in Nature:

Psalms 147:4-5

4 He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them.

5 Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

In other words- God's Greatness is greater than the Universe of stars, and His Power is behind the unendurable cold of arctic storms. Yet He cups His Hand around us and says, *"Take refuge in My Love and let the terrors of My Power become the awesome fireworks of your happy night-sky."*

So the Fear of God is what is left of the storm when you have a safe place to watch right in the middle of it. And in that place of refuge we say, *"This is amazing, this is terrible, this is incredible power; Oh, the thrill of being here in the center of the awful Power of God, yet protected by God Himself! Oh, what a terrible thing to fall into the Hands of the living God without hope, without a Savior! Better to have a millstone tied around my neck and be thrown into the depths of the sea than to offend against this God! What a wonderful privilege to know the Favor of this God in the midst of His Power!"*

And so we get an idea of how we feel both hope and fear at the same time. Hope turns fear into a trembling and peaceful wonder, and fear takes everything trivial out of hope and makes it earnest and profound. So the Terrors of God make the Pleasures of His people intense. The fireside fellowship is all the sweeter when the storm is howling outside the cottage.

So why does God delight in those who experience Him in this way- in the people who fear Him and hope in His love? Surely it is because our fear reflects the Greatness of His Power and our hope reflects the

Bounty of His Grace. And I tell you that God delights in those human responses which mirror His Magnificence. And this is just what we would have expected from a God Who is All-Sufficient in Himself and has no need of us- a God Who will never give up the Glory of being the Fountain of all Joy, Who will never surrender the Honor of being the Source of all Safety, and Who will never abdicate the Throne of Sovereign Grace.

God has Pleasure in those who hope in His Love because that hope highlights the absolute Freedom of His Grace. When I cry out, *"God is my only Hope, my Rock, and my Refuge!"* I am turning completely away from myself and calling all attention to the boundless Resources of God.

So what kind of human response can God demand from us so that the Demand itself gives good news to us and Glory to Him? This is the answer:

The Demand to hope in His Love with an earnest, profound sense
of His awesome Power.

As a sinner with no righteousness of my own, standing before a self-sufficient and holy God- what Command would I rather hear than this: *"Hope in My Love!"* If we only knew it, every one of us is stranded on an ice face in Greenland, and the wind is blowing fiercely. Our position is so precarious that even if we inhale too deeply our weight will shift and we will plunge to our destruction. And God comes to us and says in that very moment, *"I will save you, and protect you in the storm. But there is a condition."* And your heart sinks- because you know you can't meet His Conditions. Your face is flat against the ice. Your fingernails are dug in. You can feel yourself giving way. You know that if all you do is move your lips you're going to fall. You know that there is nothing you can do for God!

But then He speaks the Gospel command: *"My Requirement,"* He says, *"is that you hope in Me."* Now I ask- *"Is this not very good news?"* What could be easier than to hope in God when all else is giving way? And that is all He requires- that's the Biblical Gospel.

But this is not only good news for us sinners- I tell you that it is also the Glory of God to make only this demand upon us. Why? Because when you hope in God you show that He is strong and you are weak, that He is rich and you are poor, that He is full and you are empty.

When you hope in God- you show that *you* are the one who has needs- not God (**Psalm 50:10–15; 71:4–6, 14**). You are the patient and He is the Great Physician. You are the thirsty deer in the forest and He is the overflowing Spring. You are the lost sheep and He is the Good Shepherd.

The Beauty of the Gospel is that in one simple Demand (“Put your hope in God!”) *we* hear good news and *God* gets the Glory. And that is why God takes Pleasure in those who hope in His Love- because in this simple act of hope- God’s *Grace* is glorified and *sinner*s are saved. This is the Command of the Gospel that keeps God at the center—the center of both His Affections and ours.

Now, finally, we must ask why God does *not* take Pleasure in horses and legs as it says in verse 10:

He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.

And the point here is not that strong horses and strong legs are bad. After all, God made them.

Job 39:19-25

19 “Do you give the horse *his* might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane?

20 “Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrible.

21 “He paws in the valley, and rejoices in *his* strength; He goes out to meet the weapons.

22 “He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; And he does not turn back from the sword.

23 “The quiver rattles against him, The flashing spear and javelin.

24 “With shaking and rage he races over the ground, And he does not stand still at the voice of the trumpet.

25 “As often as the trumpet *sounds* he says, ‘Aha!’ And he scents the battle from afar, And the thunder of the captains and the war cry.

... so clearly God exults in the strength of the horse that He alone has made. And neither Job nor us can take credit for any of the horse’s wonderful powers. No, the point is *not* that this glorious animal is bad. The point is this:

In the day of battle or trouble- men put their hope in horses instead of putting their hope in God.

But **Proverbs 21:31** says,

The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the LORD.

Therefore **Psalm 20:7** says,

Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; But we boast of the name of the LORD, our God.

And **Psalm 33:17** says,

A horse is a false hope for victory, Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.

God is *not* displeased with the strength of a horse or the legs of a man because they are good things that He has made. But He is displeased with those who put their *hope* in their horses and in their legs. And God is displeased with people who put their hope in missiles or in makeup, or in tanks or tanning parlors, or in bombs or in body-building. God takes no Pleasure in corporate efficiency or balanced budgets or welfare systems or new vaccines or education or eloquence or artistic excellence or legal processes- when these things are the treasure in which we hope or the achievement in which we boast. Why? Because when we put our hope in horses and in legs- then horses and legs get the glory and not God.

So when we say that God exults over His people with shouting- we mean that He exults over those who hope in His Love. And in this way- God maintains His rightful Place- the Place we love for Him to have- at the very center of the Gospel.

So there is a condition that we must meet in order to know God as our God and be a part of the wonderful Covenant in which He never turns away from doing us good but rejoices over us with all His Heart and all His Soul. And that condition is to put our hope in Him as the all-satisfying Refuge and Treasure. And God takes great Pleasure in this

response with all His Heart- precisely because it magnifies the Glory of His Grace and satisfies the longing of our soul.

Amen. Let's pray.